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Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Intrinsic dignity of the human person and the Millennium Development Goals

The recognition that all human beings have intrinsic dignity is the only foundation for human rights. It is the intrinsic worth of the human person that provides the basis on which to found policies and laws that create conditions under which human beings can flourish. Without such a foundation, human rights are articulated and enforced on the basis of the subjective preferences of those in power, thus undermining the entire human rights movement and leading to violations of human rights.

The World Youth Alliance recognizes that the task of achieving the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls must have as its centre a fundamental respect for the intrinsic dignity of the person. Every act of violence against women and girls offends that dignity, and constitutes a corresponding violation of human rights. Furthermore, violence against women and girls is an obstacle to sustainable development and stands in the way of the full achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Women and girls must be free from violence and have full access to health care, shelter, education, participation and protection for progress towards authentic sustainable development.

The World Youth Alliance will analyse and propose improvements for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the dignity of the human person. Specifically, we will highlight the critical importance of access to education and the role of the family to empower women and girls and reduce vulnerability to violence.

Access of women and girls to education

Violence against women and girls is a consequence of the problem in which the fundamental equality between women and men is not respected. Increased access to education is critical to empower women and bring about greater recognition of their equality. States must invest in women's education in order to bring about reduced family poverty, increased health and reduced child mortality.

Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals states that children everywhere shall be able to achieve a full course of primary schooling. Goal 2 recognizes that education is a primary factor in overall human development. Achieving that development goal is especially important for girls, as education helps to reduce the risks of trafficking, break the cycle of poverty through generations and reduce vulnerability to rape and sexual exploitation.

Poverty, undernourishment and unemployment are the primary factors that prevent girls from finishing primary school. Lack of stability in households can lead to early marriage or to girls being forced to work before they complete their schooling. By improving the situation of the girl child living in poverty and deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, without access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, dropout rates will be reduced. In addition, by eliminating school abandonment the girl child will be empowered.

Early and forced marriage as well as early sexual debut hamper girls' access to education. Early pregnancy and childbearing can entail complications and are often impediments to improvements in the educational, economic and social status of women in all parts of the world. In developed and developing countries, the trend towards early sexual experience undermines efforts to fight HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. Forced marriage also has adverse physical and psychological effects on girls when it includes threatening behaviour, abduction, imprisonment, social isolation, labour exploitation, physical and sexual violence, rape and even murder.

The World Youth Alliance stresses the importance of preventing all forms of violence against the girl child, including physical, mental, psychological and sexual violence. Occurring both in families and at school, torture, child abuse and exploitation, hostage-taking, domestic violence and paedophilia are all human rights violations in themselves, and, when experienced, further hinder girls' access to education and their human development. Those problems will be solved through promoting the benefit of education both in families and at school and through the creation of appropriate, innovative, targeted programmes that go beyond the current legal frameworks to form and create awareness in girls, boys, parents, families, local communities, political, religious and traditional leaders and educational institutions about the dignity of each human person, including the girl child. Educating both boys and girls about equality and their intrinsic dignity is critical in the fight against violence.

Respect for the girl child's right to education starts at the earliest stages of life. Population policies that seek to control fertility inevitably lead to discrimination against the girl child through prenatal sex selection, sex-selective abortion and infanticide. Coercive abortion is a particularly forceful form of violence against women in which women are physically forced to undergo abortions, often in a brutal and high-risk manner. Moreover, the impact on women is doubly discriminatory as it is female foetuses that are most frequently aborted given the culture of son preference present in many parts of the world.

Role of the family in education

The World Youth Alliance affirms that the fundamental group unit of human society is the family, in which women and men learn to live in genuine freedom and solidarity. It is critical that the important role of the family in combating violence against women and girls be supported. Although the State has a duty to provide access to education, no institution can assume the role of the family as primary educator because the biological and sociological ties between family members cannot be replicated. It is within the family that children first learn that they have intrinsic value, that responsibilities should be shared and that human beings, no matter what their situation or condition, should be respected. The family prepares the individual to access society and is the place where individuals are equipped to fulfil their social obligations.

In developed and developing countries, education to understand the intrinsic value of both women and men and to promote equal sharing of responsibilities, in both formal and informal work, should be encouraged. The education should focus on the inherent value of caregiving and other responsibilities that have typically

been undertaken by women and girls, and that promote human flourishing, interconnectedness and the basis for building strong families at the heart of society.

Conclusion

The world's greatest resource is the human person. Investment in the human person at the local level ensures the protection of that resource. Investment in women in particular is critical because of their roles as mothers, providers and caretakers. Women drive solutions within their own local communities because they both understand the problems of their communities and know the appropriate ways to confront and solve them. Healthy and educated women, free from violence, contribute economically and raise healthy families. They transform their communities and ensure human flourishing for all those around them. Only a system that respects the intrinsic dignity of the human person will reach the goal of eliminating violence against women and girls.